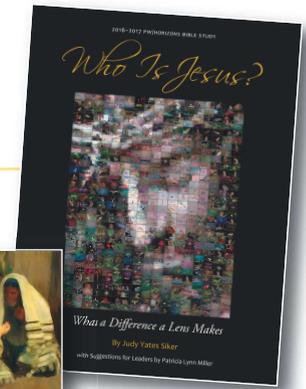


## Sowers and Seeds and Weeds and Deeds

BY KATIE MULLIGAN

For use with Lesson Two of the 2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes* by Judy Yates Siker



### Scripture: Matthew 13:51–53

“Have you understood all this?” Jesus asked, after hitting his disciples with one parable after another after another. Sowers and seeds and weeds and deeds. Yeast and flour and pearls and fish. Buried treasure. “Have you understood all this?”

“Oh yes!” claimed the disciples—and wouldn’t you? Jesus spoke in parables, and those who understood held the keys to the kingdom of heaven! “Oh yes!” they said.

“The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. . . . Have you understood all this?”

“Oh yes!” they said.

Oh yes?

Once, at an outdoor festival, my feet were so very tired. It was dry and dusty, everything was dirty and hot. I walked past a tent with a sign: “Foot washing. Come in and rest.” The people in the tent offered healing prayer, foot washing, dream interpretation. The people in the tent were “the kind of Christian” I usually avoided: conservative, evangelical, uncomfortable to my more liberal, inhibited self. But my feet were tired and dusty. So I went in.

She washed my feet, the lady in the tent. And as she washed she blessed me. I was deeply moved and equally uncomfortable.

The next year the festival asked me to work as a chaplain, and they told me my supervisor would be the pastor from the healing tent. When he called to talk about our work together, I interrupted and said, “Listen, I know you’re probably on the more conservative side of things. I’m a queer, divorced, single-mother pastor. If that’s going to be a problem for you, I don’t want to do this.” I figured I was “the kind of Christian” they usually avoided or judged.

There was quiet on the phone, and I thought I understood what that meant. Have you understood all this? I thought I did. I thought he did.

“I think it will be all right,” he said. He invited me to camp with his group, since we were coming in late in the evening. They would hold a spot for us.

When we arrived it was dark, in the mountains of North Carolina, pouring down rain. His people—“those kind of Christians”—helped us unload the van and set up our tents, then they invited us to eat. I wondered what the catch was. We ate and talked; no catch.

The next day, as I worked the festival, I came upon some people who had no food. I told them to go see my friend back at the camp, that I thought perhaps they could join us for dinner. “Tell them I sent you!” I said with glee. And secretly I thought, “Aha! We’ll see if they’re really that kind of Christian.”

When I got back to camp, my new friend said, “Some people came by and they were hungry.

They said you sent them to us. So we fed them." I thought perhaps he would be angry or annoyed. I thought perhaps I wouldn't be welcome there anymore. He smiled and said, "This is such a wonderful idea! Next year we will create a food ministry for those who do not have enough!" And they did exactly that.

I have tried for five years to get kicked out by *those* kind of Christians, but they will not do it. They consistently respond with love and openness, even when I *know* they won't. Once, when I was sure I had offended, one of them said, "I saw you sitting there earlier, and I thought: This is a woman who is loved by God."

Have you understood all this? The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Do you see it?

We think we know but we don't. Once I found welcome with people I thought would despise me. Once I found welcome with people who thought my ways were very strange. Once I found welcome with "the kind of Christians" I usually avoid.

I thought I knew "the kind of Christians" I encountered, but I didn't.

In her study, Judy Yates Siker writes, ". . . it is not enough for the parables to be studied. They must be lived" (25).

Have you understood all this? In what unlikely place will you plant a seed? Which border will you cross? Whom will you love whom you thought unlovable? Whom will you allow to love you?

## Questions

1. Is there a parable that speaks to you clearly? Why and how do you relate to it?
2. When was a time you made assumptions about another person, another Christian?
3. What helped you move past those assumptions?
4. Is there someone you consider other/different/impossible/heretical/awful? Would you consider reaching out to that person? What would be the first step?

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